

## **Testimony of Kelly Badillo**

**Member of 32BJ Service Employees International Union**

**Before the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee**

**Tuesday, March 10, 2009**

Good morning. Thank you for allowing me to tell my story. My name is Kelly Badillo and I have been a 32BJ member for more than 20 years. My family is a union family. I remember going to strikes and walking the picket lines at 10 years old. My brother and I joined my father in the union and worked alongside him at the World Trade Center for the contractor American Building Maintenance.

My union has always been there for me, my wife and my two beautiful daughters. I am here to tell you how my union supported me and my co-workers after the terrorist attack on September 11.

On the morning of September 11, I was in the lobby of the North Tower waiting to relieve people from the elevator I operated when the plane hit. The noise and the trembling were so loud I thought that someone was filming a movie.

Then, a woman ran into the building on fire and I realized that something horrible was happening. As we rushed to put the fire out, chaos broke out. People were running everywhere, trying to escape the building, but outside there was debris falling everywhere. I didn't really know what was happening until the fire department arrived and we evacuated the building.

I walked about a block before I turned around to see what happened. I remember speaking to a police officer while looking up at the building, realizing that my brother worked on the 76<sup>th</sup> floor. I was trying to get back into the building when the 2<sup>nd</sup> plane hit the South Tower. Everyone started running away from the buildings, getting as far as we could before they both came down.

After the buildings fell, all I remember hearing was silence and all I remember feeling was the dust. I was covered up to my knees in debris and unable to see anything. Luckily I had a flashlight that I carried with me at the job. I was afraid to walk down the street because of holes in the ground caused by fallen debris, so I stayed still. Eventually I saw a couple of my fellow 32BJ co-workers walk down the street toward me. One, Eddie, told me his mother-in-law lived on Cherry Street and once we got there we would be safe. As soon as we got there I called my wife to let her know I was okay and was relieved to learn my brother was alive, thanks to an especially tough commute that made him late to work that morning. My wife, an accountant, told me to go near her office where they were sending out ferries to New Jersey, where we lived. I remember being on the ferry looking back at Manhattan, and that's when it hit me: I no longer had a job.

2,750 people lost their lives, including 47 SEIU members. Many thousands more lost their jobs. More than 1,200 32BJ members – cleaners, security officers, building maintenance, window washers and elevator operators like me – were suddenly trying to live on unemployment.

One week later, I got a call from my union. They asked me to come to our union hall and meet with American Building Maintenance. There were more than 800 people there when I got there.

Working together, my union and my employer agreed to:

- \$100 per week in supplemental unemployment.
- Continued health insurance for us and our families.
- We kept our pensions.
- The Green Cross was in our union hall everyday to help us deal with our loss and the psychological effects of September 11.

In January of 2002, they called us back. This time they had found a way to get us back to work. They created a priority hiring list so when positions in other

buildings came open, we would get those jobs. Through an early retirement plan they helped open additional spots as well.

32BJ was able to work side-by-side with ABM to find work for people like me. I went to work at the Bank of New York Mellon the next month as an elevator operator.

My story is a rare one because of the circumstances involved. But my story exemplifies that businesses and unions can work together for the benefit of hardworking Americans like me. My daughters are grown and have jobs of their own, but I can only hope they can enjoy a strong voice on the workplace like I have had. In today's economy it helps to know that, working together, my union and my employer will make sure the whole team gets through it.

It takes leadership to sit down and work together, but everyone has that in them. Thank you for your time. God bless you and God bless your work.